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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ALLAWI ALLY JANABI ON ELECTION PROSPECTS

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT FORD FOR REASON
S 1.4. (B) AND (D).

1. (C) Saad Al-Janabi, head of the Iraqi Republican Group running under Ayad Allawi's National Iraqi List coalition, told Poloffs that he hopes the coalition will win at least 43 seats, despite expected ballot stuffing and other irregularities on behalf of the Shi'a and Kurdish coalitions. In an unsigned editorial in his As-Siyada newspaper, Janabi repeated reports that Iranian pilgrims coming to Najaf carried fake Iraqi passports, ostensibly to allow them to vote illegally on December 15. (Note: Legally, voters whose names do not appear on voter rolls are unable to vote, unless they can prove that they are registered. End Note). He believes the Allawi coalition will do very well in Ninewa and Kirkuk, especially in tribal areas. Janabi became visibly annoyed when Poloff asked about "rent at tribe" -- reports that tribes are being paid for their votes. He explained that there is nothing wrong in reimbursing tribal leaders for costs incurred in organizing meetings of members to discuss the election and to provide these members with small gifts. It is an Arab custom, explained Janabi and cannot be equated with buying votes.

2. (C) Janabi, a key Allawi lieutenant in the election campaign, said that the biggest problem in Iraq today is not security as most people believe, but the lack of a political culture, caused in part by the deprivations that followed the Coalition occupation and the resultant insurgency and sectarian violence. So rather than debate platforms and campaign themes, some political parties are resorting to defamation, character assassination and violence. Primitive methods of tearing down or defacing campaign posters are common. The IECI must be especially vigilant to prevent any tampering of the election, said Janabi, and observers are key to the effort.

3. (C) Chances for an Allawi-formed coalition government are good, said Janabi, hinting at agreements with both the Tawafog and Kurdish coalitions. He said his Iraqi Republican Group will merge with Allawi's National Accord after the election. Though Janabi said he is being touted to head either the Defense or Interior Ministries in the new government, he would prefer the post of Minister of Communication. Janabi claimed he is considered a palatable choice for the Defense or Interior post by both Sunnis and Shi'a. Janabi also claimed that Sunni Arab hard liner and Muslim Ulema Council leader Harith al-Dari, a close friend of Janabi's father (whom Janabi calls "uncle"), gave Janabi his seal of approval in a side conversation at Arab League's preparatory conference in Cairo last month.

4. (C) Janabi has a budding media empire, all run from his palace (one of the four palaces extensively refurbished - formerly occupied by Saddam's daughters and claimed by Janabi since they sit on land expropriated from the family by Saddam). The Al-Rashid radio and television station broadcast in a 40 km radius around Baghdad and he has plans to expand into other cities in Iraq. His "As-Siyada" newspaper, distributed in Baghdad, published 50,000 copies daily and he publishes an English language weekly called the Baghdad Mirror.

5. (C) Comment: Saad al-Janabi's family owns properties in Baghdad, including in the International Zone. His money is helping in the Allawi campaign. His seeking the Communications Ministry might be connected to his own business interests. The challenge for business-oriented people like Saad Janabi is to learn how to represent broader interests of their communities instead of personal and family business interests. This likely will be a long process.
KHALILZAD